

FINE PRINT

FALL 2015
FREE

THE SMURF
AN EXCERPT FROM FRECKLEFACE, A MEMOIR-IN-PROGRESS
LEE STREBY

Fifth Grade. 10 Years Old. North Webster, Indiana

Steve Hill, a handsome, young preacher, gifted tenor, and recording artist, was one of the associate pastors at the Glory Barn, the fundamentalist Christian cult my parents had joined. Steve was also married to Pastor Hobart Freeman's oldest daughter, Pam. Not to be outshined by Brother Freeman's booming Glory Barn ministry business, Steve launched an annual Faith Seminar weekend retreat, held at the Sheraton Airport Hotel in Indianapolis. Every family from the Glory Barn who could muster up enough cash to go for the weekend joined these annual events, which featured revival-style meetings every afternoon and evening, with musical productions that rivaled anything Billy Graham or The Gaithers might have put together.

It was at the first seminar weekend my family attended when I was in fifth grade that I was browsing the hotel gift shop and happened upon an adorable stuffed, blue Smurf. I loved the Smurfs! I bought it. I carried it around in my back pocket, its cute little blue-capped head peeking out at everyone behind me. People told me it was so cute. I loved that little Smurf and slept with it all weekend.

A week after we returned home from the holy-roller weekend, I developed a severe flu. I had an extremely high fever, nausea, diarrhea, the works. Because the Glory Barn believed in faith healing rather than going to doctors, Mom laid hands on me and prayed for my healing and kept watch while I laid in bed, but things just weren't getting better.

My fever was skyrocketing, my young body wracked with pain. Mom was sitting by my bed praying when she happened to look up at my windowsill and saw the little Smurf smiling down from where I had placed it.

She got quiet, and then after a few moments she started shaking a tad. "Oh, thank you, thank you, Jesus," she said quietly.

She had had a revelation. She looked at me. "Do you know that little Smurf doll you bought, honey?" she asked, pointing up at it.

I nodded.

"The Lord just revealed to me that it's actually a demon. That's why you're sick! You bought that little magical beast and brought it into our home, and the Lord is telling us that it's not right. It's evil!"

At the Glory Barn, if you got sick, it was because something wasn't right between you and the Lord.

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. "Why would a Smurf make me sick? It's just a toy, Mom," I croaked.

"It's a demon! I know it; I feel it in my spirit. Will you trust me that my heart is right on this? You need deliverance from that Smurf, honey."

The more she thought about the Smurf, the more convinced she became of her revelation. The little creatures who lived under mushrooms were just demons in disguise, looking to invade the bodies of little boys like me.

As sick as I was, I would have let her convince me that Coca-Cola was holy water. I didn't see that I had much choice. I agreed to go through an exorcism of the Smurf. Mom grabbed the Smurf doll off the sill and began shaking it in her hand.

"Satan!" she said to it, "I command your little blue demon to loosen hold on my son!" Then she put her hand on my head. "Repeat after me..."

I nodded and followed.

"Dear Heavenly Father, I repent for allowing this demonic creature into my heart and our home. I command that Satan loosen his grip on my mind, heart, body, and soul. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen." I repeated it all as told.

Then Mom really got down to business. She slapped my forehead again, harder. "IN THE NAME OF JESUS, I CAST OUT YOU SMURF DEMON FROM HELL! SHAMA KA HA LA SA BA MALA CA RAY SA MALA SHAMA KA!" she babbled, praying in tongues, a prayer language only God can understand. The poor Smurf doll was torched outside that afternoon.

Coincidentally, my fever broke that night and by the next morning I was fine. At the next Glory Barn meeting, my mother made me stand up and tell the congregation the entire story as a testimony. Nobody laughed. They all rejoiced. Several people told my Mom later that they also rid their homes of Smurfs and put their kids through deliverance exorcisms, just to be safe. To this day, I cannot look at a Smurf and not feel just a little sick.



SANDWICH BITCH VOL I
FRANCES MICHELLE LOPEZ

I was sitting in the waiting room of my gynecologist, being (lack of) baby-shamed by all the creepy portraits of infants and toddlers wearing diapers and top hats, when a show of the "I think my wife is cheating on me and I don't think that child is mine" variety came on. Those kinds of trashy daytime shows are very entertaining to watch in settings where people in the same room have very limited interaction. You often find yourself in a situation in which, every now and then, you hear a cynical "mmhmm..." or "Ooh, if that were my husband...I'd beat his ass"—to which you, by universal code of civility, must acknowledge with an "I hear you, sister" or a more typical "I know, right?"

During this recent encounter, a lanky Morticia Addams type-gal sat across from me reading a magazine while the tv's "Oh, no you didn't" charades echoed into the hospital's stiff white corridor. This particular episode dealt with fetishes. In particular, a combination of food obsessions and freaky S&M shit. Morticia would look up from her magazine every now and then to gaze upon the spectacle; a sleek smirk on her face.

The receptionist noticed her and felt compelled to comment: "Oh, I see we've got a freaky deaky girl in here this morning," she playfully called out in her thick Filipino accent.

Morticia didn't look up after that. After a few minutes, the nurse continued.

"It's okay, mama. Everyone's got their thing," she said as she swiped a mom-to-be's credit card. "Love is a buffet...you can eat anything as often as you'd like!"

It took great restraint for me not to giggle. What did that even mean? Before I could process it, my number was up. In I went for the annual song and dance where I ask for another year of the pill and my doctor asks me countless questions about when I plan on spawning. She gets pushier about it every year. This time I reply with a newfound piece of knowledge: "Life's a buffet, I can eat anything as often as I'd like!"

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THE CHILDREN'S GUIDE TO
ASTRAL PROJECTION



**BRASS
TACKS
PRESS**

BY J. A. HOMES lifeasapoet.com

UN - CUDGEL
DYLAN KRIEGER

where there's a spine
there's a gutter

like misery & cream
cheese we

fit together held by
sex & letters

one after another I
smother my

stuttered affections
for those w/o

rubbers or the power
to un-cudgel

their inner mothers
look out I'm

outing everyone I've
never been

allowed to love
snorting bad

fortune & some fat-ass
line about

abortion-laced buffets
teaching portion

control to americans
who still breed

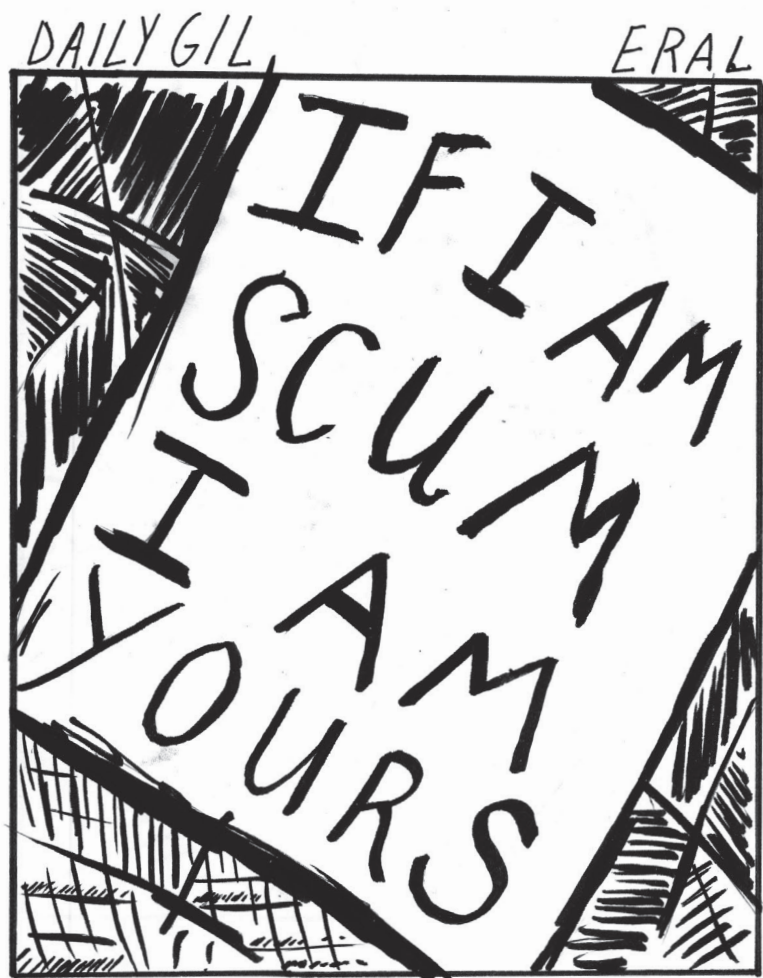
& feed in boldface
uppercase outrage

against the day that
prays backspace

efface their kind like
spermicide

designed to wipe the
ripe world

out to sea



CHRISTOPHER YOUNG

I
stop watching porn
it's too awesome
set your bar lower
strive for less

II
i grabbed a willie nelson album
pulled out the record
it was wham
i don't own a wham album
well
i suppose i do now
what a pleasant surprise
i'm enjoying it
you sing george michael
and the other guy
you sing

KNIFE SONNET NO.2
JASMINE DREAME WAGNER

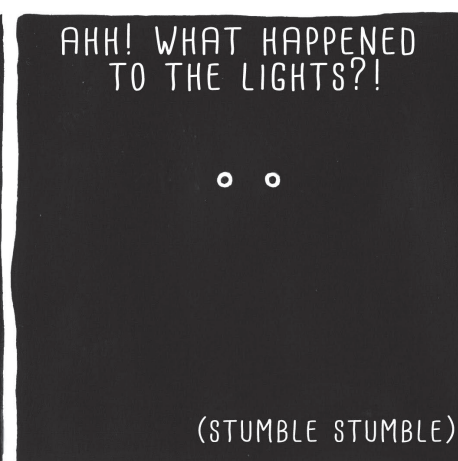
I was irrelevant and I didn't care
I was as much a flower as I was a follower

One day I'd bloom; one day I'd be fragrance
It didn't bother me; I didn't bother me

I didn't make me feel I was wrong
to speak my name or shut my trap

How specific it felt, so here, so now—
how spectacularly sharp. This room

I offer in the abstract
before I lash out



FEATURED ARTIST

Jeremy Szuder is a Los Angeles-based artist who has been exploring various creative outlets since the early 1990s. His work as a visual artist has mostly centered on different forms of the portrait, and his methods have included drawing, painting, printmaking, and stenciling as well as various combinations of these methods. His most recent work, however, has focussed more consistently on ink drawings full of precise and intricate patterns. Szuder also spent many years creating music, performing with the now-defunct psychedelic garage-rock outfits Los Cincos and Syncopation. Szuder provided us with the center spread for this issue of Fine Print and spoke with us a little about his background and creative process.

Where do you find inspiration for your work?

Inspiration, as a vehicle, remains the very same no matter the transition in which I may find myself: *the portrait*. I am completely at the mercy and whim of the portrait. It is the final execution of a stalwart presentation. It echoes royalty. It demands respect. It calls for attention. The portrait is as old as time. It neither ages nor dies. It introduces us to our past. I very well may carry my obsession with the portrait to my grave.

You often give your portraits a twist, adding things like an extra eye or simply doing them on unconventional materials such as luggage tags. What is your reason for doing this?

I add extra eyes sometimes to a particular composition to express spirituality. I am a firm believer in meditation and in reaching out to the universe in order to tap into the larger collective pool of vibrations and energies.

Sometimes I draw hats and crowns, either floating or perched lovingly atop heads. I've worn hats my entire life, and in these older years of mine I've come to realize that it may be me dealing with and releasing the grip on my miniature bout with agoraphobia.

The wardrobe tags signify the importance of fashion, which was something I've appreciated since childhood. The art I make is how I try to look when I walk the streets every day. It is very important to me that the art be a direct reflection of me.

There is also a very abundant usage of numerology, as well as letters and punctuation symbols, in my works. I save up and record numbers that are imbedded into my personal life, and I use them from time to time to sort of lay out a much broader and larger picture. The numbers and letters mean something on their own, but they also carry the responsibility of possibly entertaining a lifelong code whose meaning will have to rest in the hands of those who reside on earth after my time.

Did you go to school for art or is it something you picked up on your own?

I took classes in grade school because it was mandatory...In high school, you were given the choice to take any extra-curricular classes you wanted, and unfortunately I had no idea that art was something that could become an actual career. Nobody told me. So I kind of side-stepped art and instead took other classes that varied in mediums and disciplines. I was trying to reach out and learn multiple practices or crafts. That trait has kind of followed me and haunted me my entire life. Only now, at this very point in my life, am I actually buckling down and almost "forcing" my creative path to remain on a singular course.

What singular course do you feel like your creative path is following?

Well, I will say there is a course set; I definitely feel that is real. As far as following it goes, I would rather refer to the process as more of a forging of a path. As I forge this path, I become more aware of what options I have...to go in one direction or another. Although this forging is very time consuming—very calculated—in my previous 10-year art cycle, I spent a lot more time "following," which resulted in my being very disappointed with what the art world had to offer. When all was said and done, I came to the realization that it would be much more beneficial to me to focus on reinventing myself.

You have worked with many different mediums, though your more recent work focuses on ink drawings. Why did you decide to stick with this format and how does it differ from making work using other methods?

I have to refer back to my previous 10-year art cycle. I made a conscious decision then to fully immerse myself in the process of making as much art as I had time for, and during that period, I made art with anything and everything I could get my hands on. It was a very long experience, and along the way I made paintings with oil, acrylic, stencils, lettraset, collage, spray paint, stamps, xerox transfers, ink, stains, tar, just about anything. Every step of the way, I was trying to figure out how to bring as many of those elements as possible into one piece of finished art. When those paintings finally manifested themselves, it was then time to stop, time to quit, time to move on.

Beginning this particular chapter or art cycle, I decided on ink and paper as my springboard. These were some of the very first mediums I ever used to express myself in a bigger, more profound way. I have made a decision to try and start at my biographical beginnings, in hopes that I might have a very clear objective and vision of what it was I wanted from myself and from the universe.

Apart from making visual art, you have played in a number of bands. How do those creative endeavors differ from one another and do you feel like they have had an influence on each other?

Music and art both work off of each other—that has always been my belief. And in the same sense, art and music also couldn't be more different. I think the production of music is something that triggers different parts of the human consciousness, as well as the senses, and art appeases other synapses that perhaps music/sounds may not. I used to always make it a point to play music very loudly in my previous art cycle because I wanted the vibrations to penetrate the artwork as much as possible. These days, I almost always prefer to work in silence. I can hear my thoughts more these days. I can hear the pen nibs scratch the surface of the paper. It's very primal and very gratifying. I do make music these days, yes, but it is a ritual/process that is of a very different nature and has very little to do with my visual art.

Who were your subjects for the portraits you've given us for this issue of Fine Print and how did you choose them?

The subject is paying my respects in an almost holy manner to the trifecta of rotational vinyl disc speeds. 33 (it's actually 33.3, but I chose to omit the .3 for this one), 45, and 78 revolutions per minute (rpms), to be exact. I regularly make a point of allowing these fine numbers into my compositions somehow, and because this fine rag of yours is one dealing with music, in one way or another, I thought it would be a great podium for paying my respects.

When making a portrait, do you work with a live model, from a photograph, or using some other method?

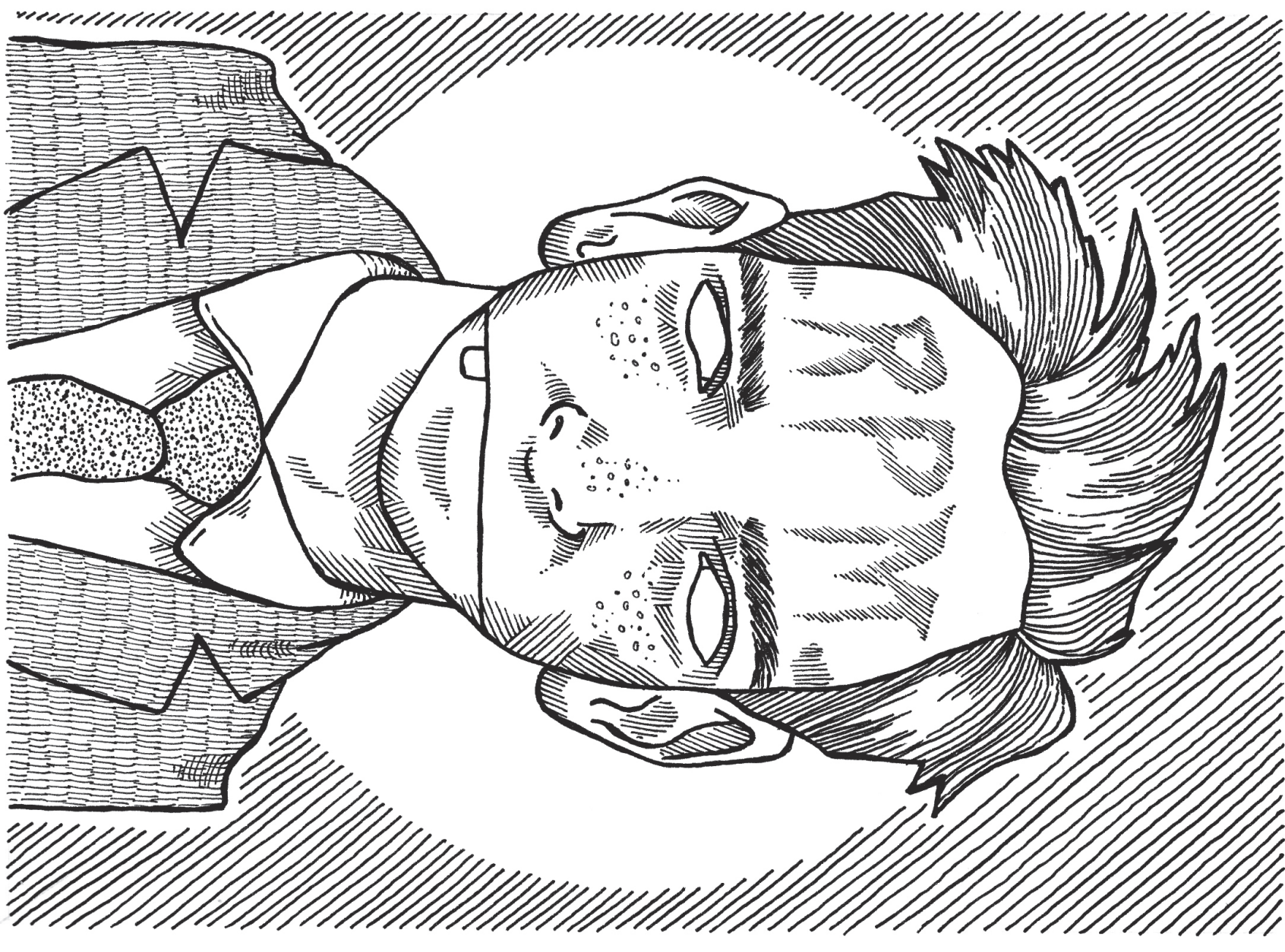
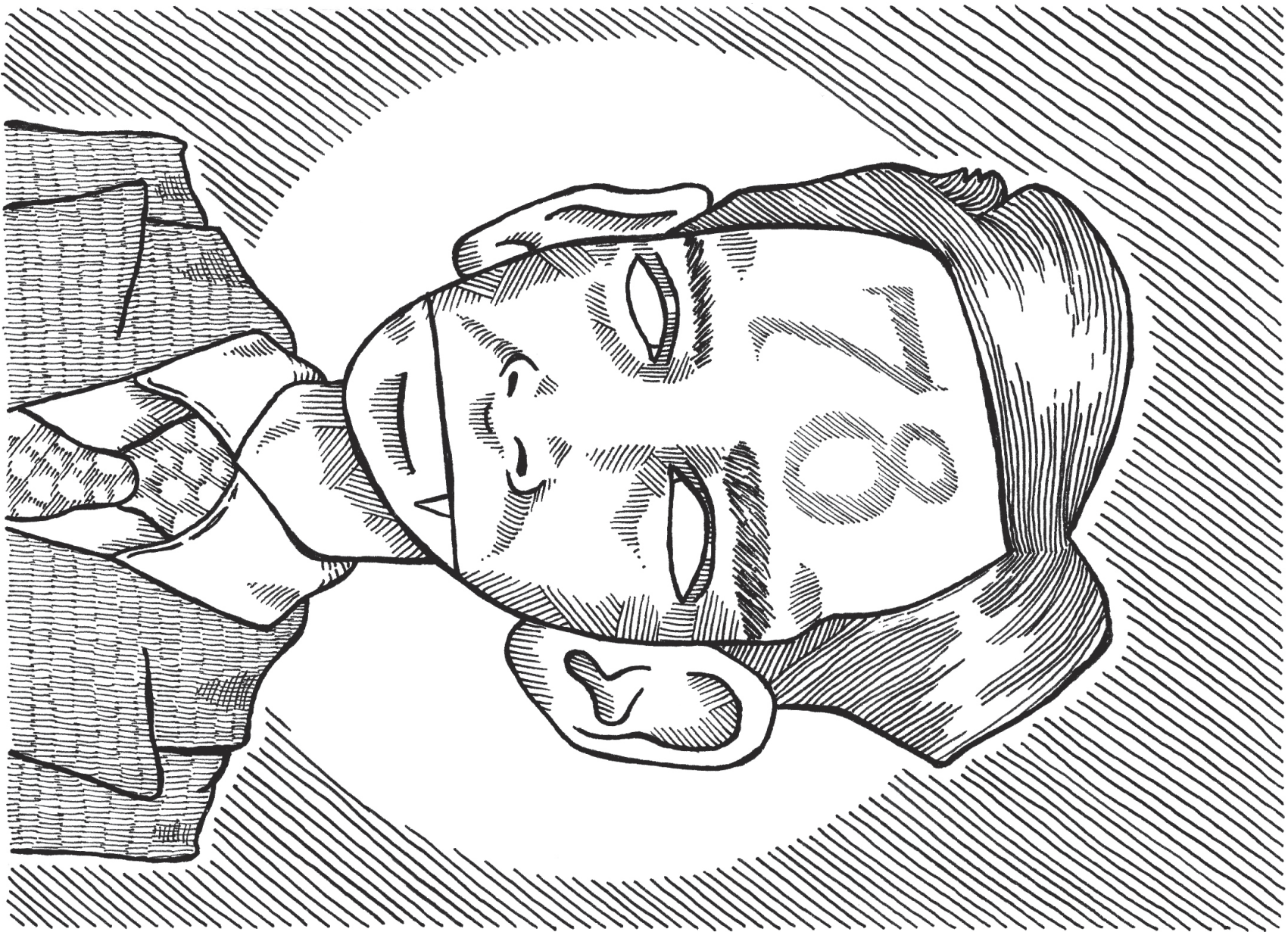
I prefer to see my visual information as flat as possible. That includes both the actual resource and the emotion or, more importantly, the lack of emotion. I like it flat, black and white, plain, insipid, and void of anything that would hinder a person's ability to look upon my works and interpret the art by including whatever information or particular emotion the observer has at that moment.

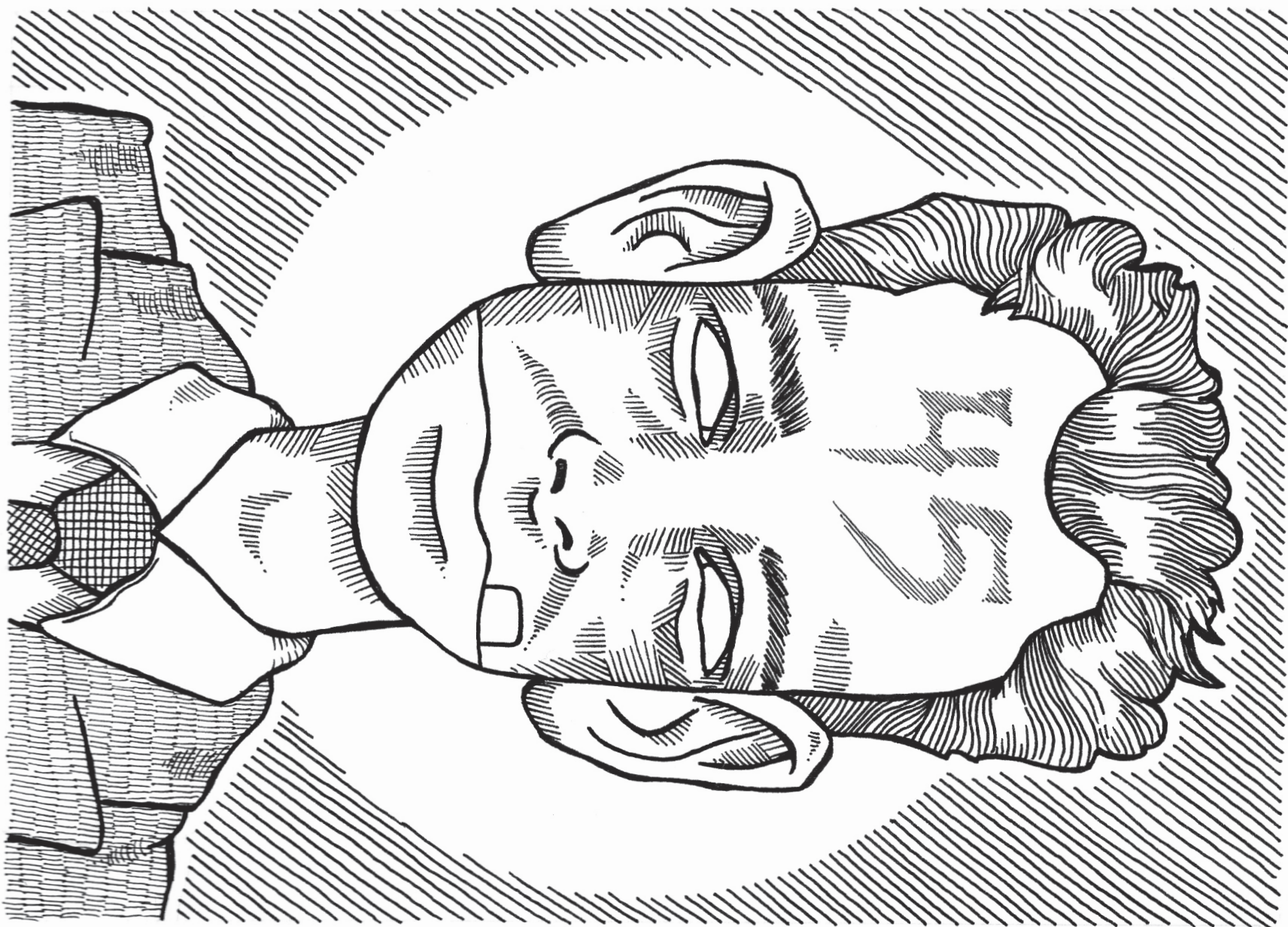
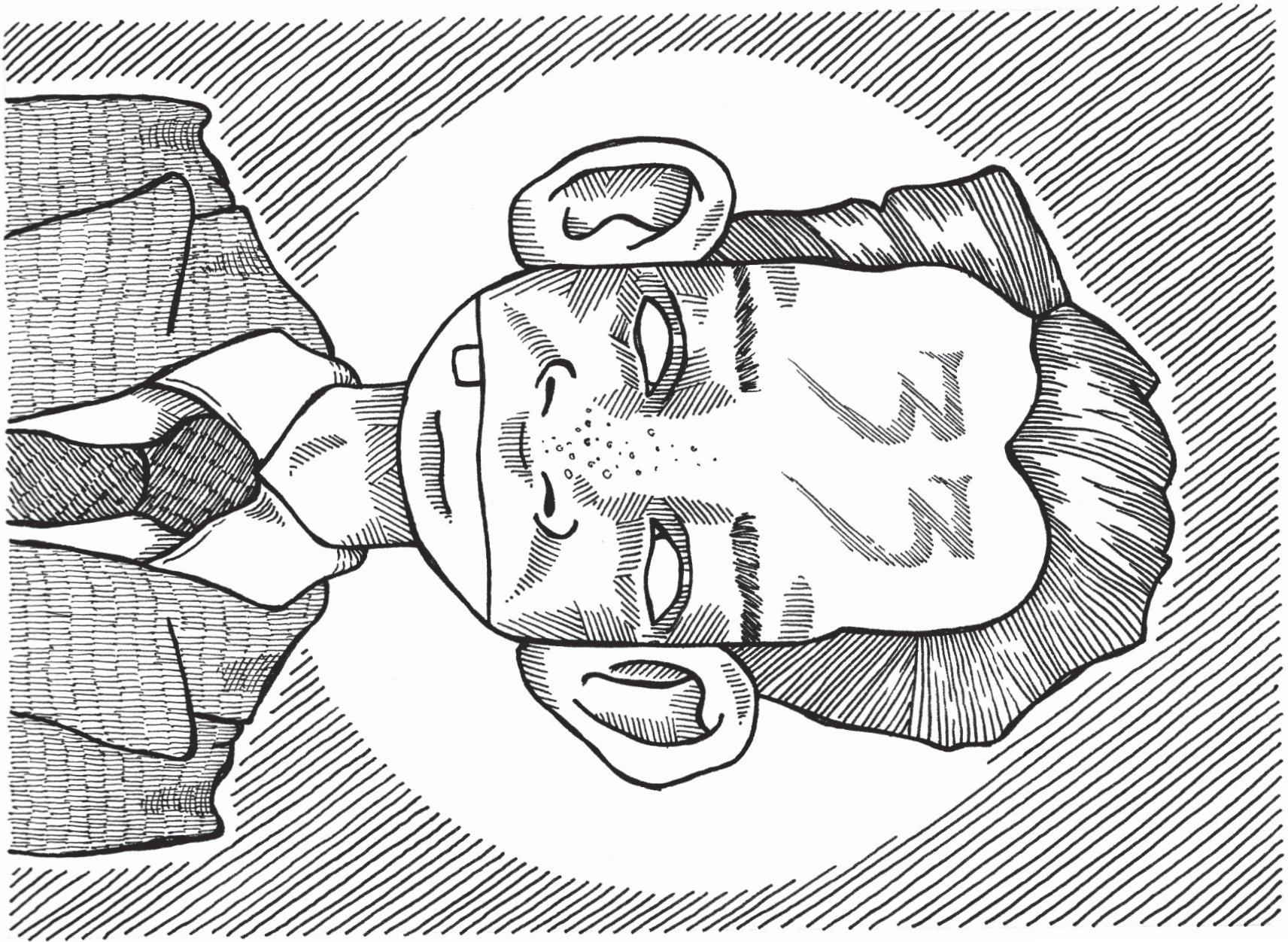
Do your subjects typically see your portraits when you are finished with them?

Not typically. I would prefer to not be present if a person should come into contact with a piece that has to do with them. My knowing how a person feels about my artwork and my interpretation of them is a hindrance to the process of the actual art being able to survive on its own.

Jeremy Szuder is currently represented by Co-Lab Gallery which is located at 5319 York Blvd. in Highland Park, California.

See more work by Jeremy Szuder online at: <https://jeremyszuder.wordpress.com/>





MOURNERS
RACHEL BIRKE

The boy rode with his father through the pale, dry plain. The rocking of the rickety, old wagon turned the boy’s stomach—undercooked eggs and fear sloshed about in his ripe belly.

“Can we stop for a second? I think I’m gonna be sick.”

The Father stared straight ahead at the heavy sky and languid pink horizon.

“Daddy, I’m really gonna be sick.”
“Twelve’s too old to be calling me Daddy.”

The boy looked about frantically for a moment and heaved himself over the side of the wagon, splattering the coarse, beige grass with equally colorless vomit. The wavering, black outline of a gabled house formed against the gray morning fog ahead. The boy’s uneasy organs throbbed.

“I’m eleven.”

He pressed his greasy broad-rimmed hat down firmly on his skull, fixing wayward straw colored curls to his unwashed forehead.

“I don’t see why we even have to go see Uncle Jack. You been saying he was no good for years, and I only met him but three times. What’s he dying of anyway?”

“Shot. Hunting accident.”
“Shot? Is he gonna be all bloody?”

The Father twitched his shoulders and made circles with his head attempting to remedy a fictitious ache. His shaky movement reminded the boy of the picture flipbooks he liked to collect.

“Are there gonna be people crying?”

The decrepit horse came to a jerking halt before a feeble white house. It was peaceful. There was no sound emanating from the bedroom where Uncle Jack laid dying, just blurry shadows shuffling about in the dusty window. The Father dismounted the wagon at a leisurely pace, glaring at the defenseless house with his sagging dull blue eyes. The boy followed apprehensively. He straightened his dingy gray coat haphazardly and wiped his flushed cherub face with his rough-spun sleeve.

The barren parlor was inhabited by three women hunched over their knitting like complacent gargoyles. None of them were crying. The low, grating rumble of men’s somber small talk seeped from the closed kitchen door. The boy who stood beside his father in the entry way assumed this was the hunting party of the man dying upstairs.

The father lurched forward suddenly with a disdainful sneer back at the door as though shoved by a nagging ghost, throwing his muddy feet down on each step as though he were trying to get rid of them. He left the boy standing stiff and cagey-eyed in the whitewashed hall. The boy realized his apparent invisibility and walked briskly past the soiled mahogany staircase to a mesh door ajar at the end of the hall. He was greeted by a vast anemic plain, gaping ghastly and endless. The same landscape he’d just come through to reach the house. But there, behind the house, the day’s bland emptiness was menacing and cold under a blank sunset.

“Hey, how long you been here?”
“Oh...few minutes”

Protruding from the neglected country home like a fleshy limb, a soft blue dress and unkempt copper tresses.

“I didn’t expect to see you; did your pa come to apologize?”
“I don’t think so. For what?”
“Nothing. I hate it here. My folks been up there for hours.”

Cousins: sickly fruits on a gnarled family tree. The boy sniffed wildly for her familiar musty scent, but it was lost in the sweeping field winds. Her narrow white legs were bare, and their silky down was golden in the remaining sunlight creaking above them. The boy looked up at the window, yellow with age and grime, to see his father’s jagged shadow, his head still shrouded in his filthy hat.

“I’m so sad about my Uncle, really just so sad.”

As she spoke, the boy lingered on her thick lips, a little chapped and curving in a careless smile.

“So sad...I could die!”

Her head landed on the boy’s shoulder after a graceful and elongated descent. The back of her plump, young hand on her forehead, her squinting eyes on his freckled nose.

“Oh, uhm...it’s ok?”

And the boy’s eyes clung to the plush thighs and the forest of sweet smelling fabric sprouting from the top of them.

Like some heaving grand piano, the Father’s voice crushed them from the window above.

“He’s dead; let’s go.”

The girl swiftly withdrew and stretched her dress over her legs. She rested her doughy cheek on her knees and hugged herself as though to keep warm.

“Guess you better get.”

The boy rose slowly and walked, head down, to the front of the house. His father was already hoisting himself into the wagon uttering his usual guttural litany.

“Boy! Wait a minute there...”

The wobbling wail of an old woman—the boy continued toward the wagon.

“What’s his name?”

Another white haired gargoyle emerged from the front door.

“Maynard!”

The boy started his return with a few steps backward, reluctant to admit his defeat.

“The housecat had a litter; there’s just too damn many. Take the runt.”

The first woman presented the pitiful creature in her veined, leathery hands.

“Okay.”

Maynard scrambled back to the wagon with the runt in his arms. He sat in the wagon displaying it and awaiting his father’s disapproval, but the man remained silent. The father gazed absently at the back of the horse, seemingly hypnotized by the frequent spasms of its neck and ears. His brother had been drenched in cold sweat, and his eyes had pierced the man from their sallow sockets when he’d entered the bedroom. When he’d seen the deep red stain on the peach floral quilt, the man said:

“I suppose you’re expecting me to beg forgiveness, cry maybe?”

And the waxen figure had fixed its glassy eyes on the ceiling and replied,

“I don’t expect nothing but for you to rot.”

In the wagon beneath the lilac night sky, the boy could feel the kitten’s frail ribcage beneath its flesh as it squirmed in his hands.



CHRISTOPHER PAYNE

EXPERIENCE NOTHING TOGETHER

AN ADVICE COLUMN RHEA TEPP

Q: A couple of days ago, I wrote a text message to someone I'm dating. The message included: an enthusiastic greeting, emotions that were difficult for me to express, a question, a time frame of my availability to meet up in person to discuss the contents of my text message, and, lastly, a series of emojis that conveyed my desire to give and receive love. The message was delivered and seen. The person began typing a response at least twice, but there still has been no text message reply sent back to me! I don't think I can stop thinking about this until they write back. What do I do? —*On Edge in Echo Park*

Dear On Edge,

The ability to see when a message has been read and is being responded to was created with the intention of nourishing our anxieties and perpetuating a sense of urgency in our interactions. It is important to remember that we are all learning how to best communicate with each other as technologies evolve. We don't always give ourselves, or each other, time and patience before expressing our thoughts, fears, and emotions online. If you find patience too difficult in this situation, then I suggest asking yourself "What am I afraid of?" If rejection is your fear, do you really want to spend your time with someone who doesn't appreciate or respect your openness? Text messages are a tremendous opportunity to be a courageous communicator, even though you might also be learning that some things are better saved for face-to-face conversations.

Q: Yesterday, my co-worker offered to give me a ride to my apartment after work. Once in the car, I started giving simple directions to my house, but my co-worker insisted I just enter my address into the GPS instead. We ended up taking all these really strange side streets. Every time I mentioned that there was a much faster way, my co-worker said "Don't worry about it; this is just easier." I sat quietly as we were directed to make U-Turns in circles, getting increasingly lost until we finally ended up at some abandoned building in a different part of town. Before finally asking me for proper directions, my co-

DR. SMYRNA, I SHOULDN'T SLEEP
HILAL OMAR AL JAMAL

My little girl Marnie came in last night while my wife Sara and I were discussing an emotional detachment that had been weighing down on us since the conception of our second child Florence—God rest her soul. Marnie opened the door and found the whites of our eyes.

"Hey, monster. What are you—" I started. But she interjected,

"Can I come sleep with you, please?"

She appeared afraid; her eyes were swollen and a salient air of anxiety was all about her—she's just like her father. Her energy felt intrusive to me. Felt like she was dragging some burden in with her—she's so much like her mother.

Dragging her feet only two stupid paces before stopping, heaving a tad as if to vomit, and turning away from Sara and me, with slow, deliberate movements she pulled strands of copper hair from her eyes as she might cobwebs.

"Baby, what's wrong?" I asked her sweetly. She didn't respond.

"Love?" Sara called.

At that moment, the copper hair pouring down Marnie's back began spilling down onto the Persian rug—the one my dad brought us from Syria—in waves that would swell at the small of her back and crash onto the flowers and patterns swarming like roaches at her feet.

"Love?" Sara uttered a second time, taking me by the arm but gazing right through Marnie.

worker had the nerve to ask me if I was sure I knew what my apartment looked like. Are our brains shrinking? Should I move to Canada? —*Fed Up in Los Feliz*

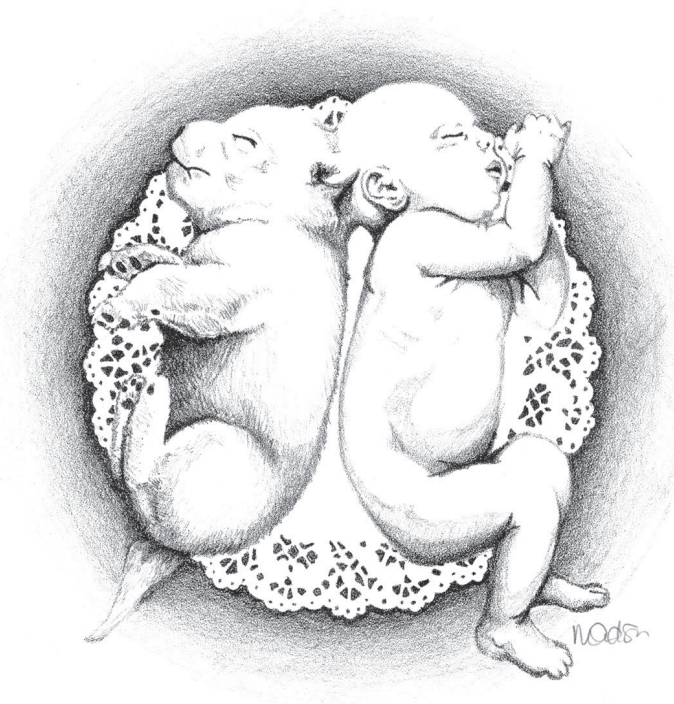
Dear Fed Up,

When I'm a passenger in a car, cradling a friend's smart phone on the open road, relying on blinking dots to get to a destination, I can't help but reflect upon the fact that we find comfort in the robotic voices of the digital world telling us how to move through the physical world. Perhaps too many of us have childhood memories of sitting in the backseat of a car, watching two adults argue over who should ask a gas station attendant for directions. Or memories of the awkward moments asking a stranger for directions at a stoplight, trying to hear them quickly describe how to find a particular restaurant while the light turns green, desperately straining to hear their semi-confident but not-so-sure recollection of place while a line of angry drivers honk their horns. Hopefully, alleviating those stressful times of the past and relying on technology to navigate direction frees our minds up to expand in other ways, like memorizing each other's phone numbers.

Q: I heard you have a flip phone. That's cute. Do you wish you could see and send emojis? —*Bored in Burbank*

Dear Bored,

It's true; I do have a flip phone. There are times when I stare off into the great abyss, and I wonder what it would be like to have a plethora of emojis to work with. Anytime someone sends me emojis my phone doesn't recognize, I reply by asking them to describe them to me instead. It's really fun. I got a beautiful one just last week when I was feeling under the weather and my dear friend offered to bring me tea and soup: an emoji of a smiling old crone with a pointy hat carrying a basket of snake oil, herbs, and jewels next to a radiating heart and a salsa dancer with a finger pointing up in the air.



And that's the moment it all came back to me.

I remembered that Sara had almost drowned in the water that broke between her legs on the 6th of February. And Florence—I do often recall how my socks had been moistened.

But last night, Sara and I were standing directly in front of one another, nude, at the epicene epicenter of our bedroom. She turned her focus back to me, and glaring intently she said, "I'm sorry."

"I'm sorry," I mocked. Her eyes narrowed.

"You're disgusting," she said, just as *my* water broke.

"You're disgusting," is the last thing I remember her saying to me.

"Well, Fred, there's a lot there," said Dr. Smyrna, her brow growing heavy and her heart palpating.

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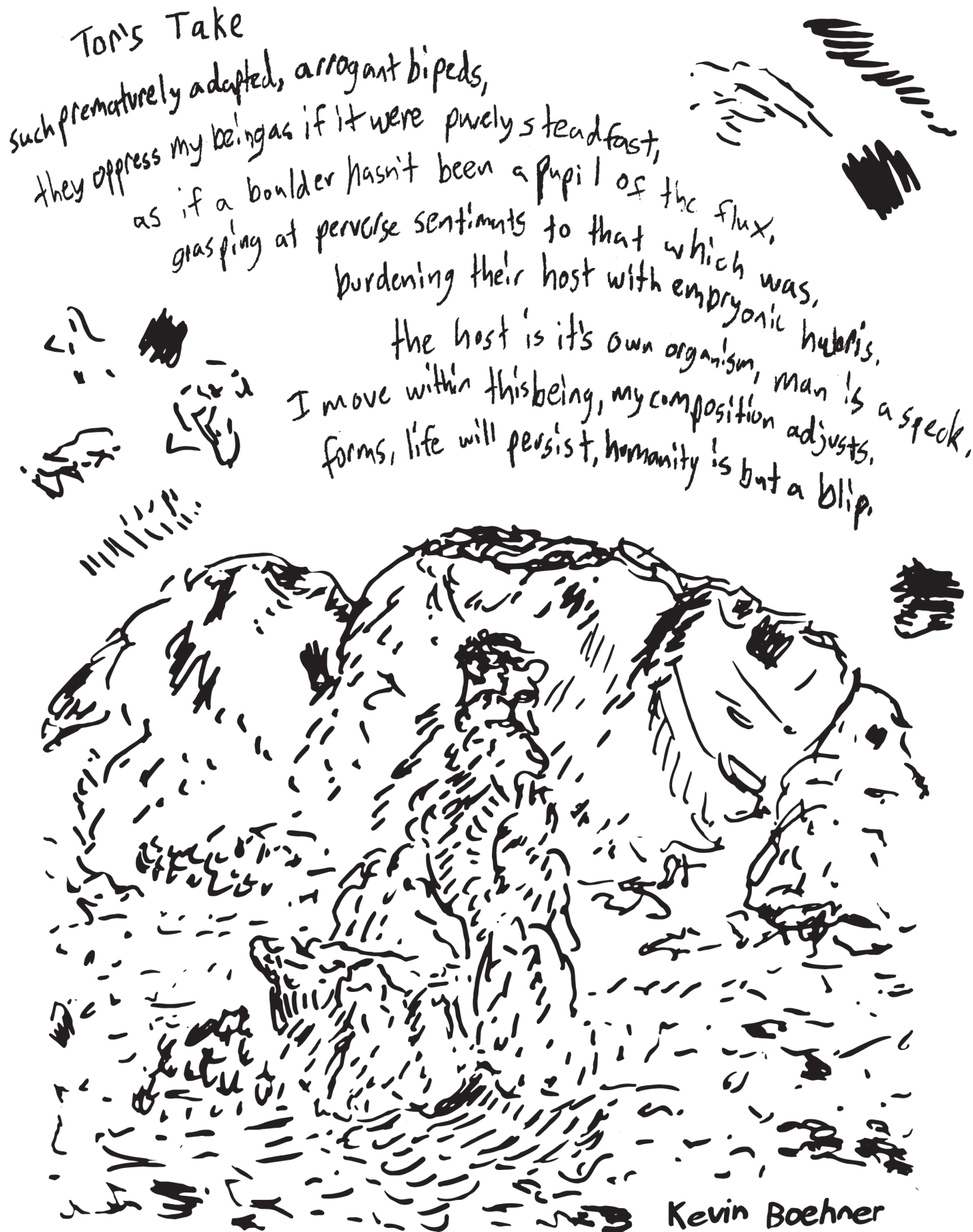
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"...oozes such pure human frustration that even the Koch brothers would approve of its passion on some level."
- Maximum Rocknroll

violencecreeps.bandcamp.com

MISSED CONNECTION

m4w, Burbank, CA

You: petite Korean woman, mid-20s with retro blue glasses and a yellow daisy tattoo behind your ear. Me: 6'5" white male wearing Bernie Sanders campaign button. We were in line at Coffee Commissary around noon on 9/30. You complimented me on my button then got on your phone to write down an order. I would like to pleasure you. I'm there weekly. Don't be shy. I'll only bite if you want me to. -PN

the WOMEN group

Since the conception of our collective in the Summer of 2012, a key question has followed us: why do we choose to call ourselves the WOMEN group? The WOMEN group is coeducational. We are feminist. We unify. We provoke in what we print. We do not discriminate. We are optimistic that in consisting of both sexes, the WOMEN group will direct the feminist movement towards unity.

thewomengroup.com/
twitter/instagram: @theWOMENgroup

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